

January 11, 2007

Contact: Robin Winchell (202) 225-4031

WASHINGTON, DC- U.S. Rep. Charlie Melancon reminded his colleagues in the House Democratic Caucus today of commitments they have made to help the Gulf Coast rebuild and recover from the devastation caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the levee failures. In a letter to Members of Congress and their staffs, Rep. Melancon reiterated his call for more support for the rebuilding efforts as well as the need for comprehensive hurricane protection for coastal communities.

**"Today, the people of Louisiana are counting on us to fulfill our promises," Rep. Melancon said.**

**"The work Congress has done so far has not been forgotten, but as those of you who have witnessed the devastation know first-hand, there is still so much more that must be done. I look forward to working with you toward keeping our commitments and continuing to make progress in this region's recovery."**

Rep. Melancon also included a link to [the Katrina Task Force report](#), which recommends specific actions Congress can take to aide the Gulf Coast's full recovery and ensure the mistakes made following Katrina and Rita aren't repeated. Finally, Rep. Melancon brought to his colleagues' attention a recent editorial from The Times Picayune outlining urgent and specific priorities the 110th Congress needs to address immediately.

The letter and editorial are copied below and attached.

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CONTACT: Robin Winchell (202) 226-5220

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## Democrats Must Keep Their Commitment to Help Rebuild the Gulf Coast

Dear Colleague:

With the 100 hour clock beginning to tick, we are already off to a momentous start in leading America into a "new direction." As many of you may remember, one of the commitments we made was to help Louisiana and the rest of the Gulf Coast rebuild and recover in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In August of last year, 25 members of the House Democratic Caucus came down to Louisiana on the one year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina to witness the devastation still present in the area. These members, including Speaker Pelosi, Leader Hoyer, and Majority Whip Clyburn, heard with their own ears what still needs to be done by Congress for the Gulf Coast to fully recover. In these meetings, we made a commitment to these people to support the Gulf Coast's rebuilding efforts and provide sufficient protection from future storms.

Today, the people of Louisiana are counting on us to fulfill our promises. Please find attached an editorial from the New Orleans Times Picayune describing the general feelings on the ground in Louisiana and the expectations that these Americans have of us, the new leaders of the 110th Congress. In addition, the Katrina Task Force produced a report with recommendations to the Caucus regarding the most pressing issues on the Gulf Coast. Click on [this link](#) to view the full report.

The work Congress has done so far has not been forgotten, but as those of you who have witnessed the devastation know first-hand, there is still so much more that must be done. I look forward to working with you toward keeping our commitments and continuing to make progress in this region's recovery.

Sincerely,

/s/

Charlie Melancon  
Member of Congress

The 110th's Commitment

The Times Picayune  
Sunday, January 07, 2007

Many members of the incoming Democratic leadership, beginning with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, have stood at the levee breaches in New Orleans at one time or another since Hurricane Katrina, pledging their support to the region's rebuilding.

Those are commitments Louisianians are counting on as the 110th Congress begins its work. Our region needs Congress to meet many of our recovery needs. But the nation also expects the new leadership to push for reforms in the federal bureaucracy to improve the government's response to future disasters.

To that end, the new Congress has a hefty agenda.

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The new leaders must keep the commitment made by their predecessors and the Bush administration to build a hurricane protection system that will keep us safe even during the strongest storms. Most of the destruction in New Orleans occurred because the levees and floodwalls that the federal government built to protect us failed during Katrina.

In particular, Congress needs to take a more active role in monitoring the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The agency, which built the shoddy levees and is in charge of rebuilding them, has taken responsibility for some of its failures. But it remains resistant to change and dismissive of outside criticism.

Congress also needs to order the corps, quickly and clearly, to close the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet. The waterway helped destroy the marshlands that once sheltered St. Bernard Parish and eastern New Orleans and aggravated the impact of Katrina's surge. The corps is recommending to close the waterway for economic reasons, but the agency does not seem to have a sense of urgency.

As important as hurricane protection is the need for home and business owners to find affordable property insurance. The current dearth of insurance options could suffocate our recovery. Congress should consider measures to alleviate the situation, such as temporary tax incentives for companies willing to write policies in the aftermath of a disaster.

Companies seeking to invest in our region can take advantage of the Gulf Opportunity Zone tax incentives. But the legislation is targeted mostly to investment in facilities and equipment. Congress ought to supplement it by adding incentives for businesses, new or established, that create long-term jobs.

Congress also ought to quickly take on the much-negotiated reauthorization of the Water Resources Development Act, which was left pending by the 109th Congress. The bill includes several hurricane and flood protection measures for Louisiana, including the Morganza to the Gulf project, which would shield about 120,000 people in Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes from storm surges.

Just as urgent is the need for Congress to consider a bill by Sen. David Vitter forgiving more than \$570 million in disaster loans to local governments. Other communities have not had to

repay loans after disasters, and it is unfair to set a different standard for this disaster. Forgiving the loans would let cash-strapped governments in south Louisiana use more of their money for rebuilding.

Other measures would aid our recovery as well as better prepare the federal government to prevent disasters and respond to them.

Chief among them is the need for serious corps reform. Congress should revive a proposal by Sens. John McCain and Russ Feingold, which was included in the water resources act, to establish independent technical review of corps projects and a ranking of projects based on national priorities, including flood and storm damage reduction.

Finally, Congress needs to carefully consider changes to the National Flood Insurance Program, so it does not penalize communities that have improved their flood protection recently. Competing proposals by Sen. Richard Shelby and Rep. Richard Baker of Baton Rouge would financially strengthen the program by allowing larger increases in premiums and lowering subsidies for second homes and businesses. But the bill Sen. Shelby filed in the last Congress would have penalized people with multiple claims, even if recent drainage improvements have lowered their flood risk, as in Broadmoor and other New Orleans neighborhoods and in large sections of Jefferson Parish.

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Some members of Congress may see this agenda as overly ambitious or may not share our sense of urgency. We invite them to come and see the depth of the wound left by the storm and the federal government's failures. Even those who support our rebuilding but have not visited the region would benefit from a trip down.

Only 51 senators and 108 representatives in the 110th Congress have been in our region since Katrina hit. Some House and Senate members are taking over new leaderships posts and an on-the-ground appreciation of the disaster is particularly meaningful in their jobs.

They include Rep. Rahm Emanuel, House Democratic Caucus chairman, and Sen. Patty Murray, Senate Democratic Conference secretary. Also on the list are Sen. Robert Byrd and Rep. David Obey, the incoming appropriations committee chairmen. Other key committee chairs who have not visited New Orleans are Sens. Daniel Inouye (Commerce), Tom Harkin (Agriculture) and Carl Levin (Armed Services), as well as Reps. Charlie Rangel (Ways and Means), Barney Frank (Financial Services), John Dingel (Energy and Commerce), John Spratt (Budget), Henry Waxman (Government Reform), Nydia Velazquez (Small Business) and Ike Skelton (Armed Services).

First-term Rep. Carol Shea-Porter, from New Hampshire, knows well the impact of visiting post-Katrina New Orleans. Rep. Shea-Porter, who lived briefly in Metairie in the early 1980s, decided to run for Congress after volunteering at Louisiana shelters following Katrina. At a meeting in November with then Speaker-elect Pelosi, Rep. Shea-Porter used her allotted time to discuss "all that still needs to be done" for Louisiana's recovery.

It's a long list. We trust Congress will not overlook it.